

Operation SHARP EDGE: The Corps' MEU(SOC) Program in Action

The evacuation of noncombatants is one of the staples of the Marine Corps' contingency response capability. In the article below, an active participant in one of the most recent of these operations details the events leading up to its execution, the lengthy planning involved, and the coordination required between Marine and country team assets to pull off such an operation.

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Operation SHARP EDGE, the noncombatant evacuation operation (NEO) to evacuate personnel from Liberia, Africa, extended from 25 May 1990 to 9 January 1991. More than 2,400 people, including 226 Americans, were evacuated during a 7-month operation conducted in the midst of a bloody Liberian insurgency. Despite the constant fighting between tribal factions in and around the area of operations, U.S. forces suffered no casualties during the entire period.

The following is a case study of the events of Operations SHARP EDGE focusing on the actions of Mediterranean Amphibious Ready Group (MARG) 2-90 comprising of Amphibious Squadron (Phibron) 4 and the 22d Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable) (MEU(SOC)). The period covered begins with the redeployment of MARG 2-90 from France until the turnover on station off the Liberian coast to MARG 3-90. While this article could easily be expanded into a book covering the joint aspects of Operation SHARP EDGE and the daily efforts of Marines and Sailors ashore in

Liberia, the focus will be broader in nature and look at not only what led up to this NEO and how it was performed, but what might serve as lessons learned for future operations of this type.

Background

Liberia is located in western Africa and is bordered by the Atlantic Ocean to the southwest, Sierra Leone to the northwest, Guinea to the north, and the Ivory Coast to the east. Its capital is the city of Monrovia. Liberia became Africa's first independent republic in 1847 and has had a long relationship with the United States ever since. Liberia is of strategic significance due to the location of a number of important U.S. communication sites in the area.

Samuel K. Doe came to power as President of Liberia via a coup d'etat in 1980. After many years of martial law a new constitution was drafted and elections were held in 1985. As a result, Doe was selected President, an office that he held until being killed by rebel forces in the fall of 1990.

On 24 December 1989 Charles Taylor, a Gio tribesman, began an insur-

gency against the government of President Doe. Taylor, a former senior Liberian Government official, had been accused years earlier by Doe of corruption and had fled the country. Upon his return to Liberia, Taylor formed an insurgent organization known as the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL). Initially a small force, the NPFL grew in size as dissatisfaction with Doe increased. Beginning on that Christmas Eve in 1989, Taylor's NPFL began a slow advance through the countryside toward Monrovia, picking up supporters as the march progressed. By June 1990, however, fissures in the rebel leadership became apparent as a splinter group, the Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia (INPFL) led by Prince Johnson, one of Taylor's top lieutenants, split off from the NPFL and mounted its own insurgency.

Taylor's early success in capturing the coastal town of Buchanan was not a rapid victory and should have given an indicator of how he would move in

the future (see Figure 1). Although Roberts International Airfield (RIA) closed several days after the arrival of the Marines' forward command element (FCE) in-country on 31 May 1990, the closure was not caused by military action but rather by the proximity of Taylor's forces nearby and veiled threats he had made in the past. The actual occupation of the airfield happened weeks later following a series of skirmishes that saw both sides gain the upper hand in fighting for the airfield. Many thought that the fall of Buchanan and RIA would badly shake the Doe government. What intelligence personnel failed to analyze was twofold.

First, Taylor, by training and background, is a classic Maoist—no hurry, gain the support of the populace. Initially this strategy worked, and Taylor's forces moved slowly northward in accordance with this concept. Despite the slowness of his advance, Taylor had difficulty in command and control and outran his logistics tail, thus the probable reason for the hold-up at RIA. The other unknowns came when he lost one of his leaders, Elmer Johnson, as well as the split-off of Prince Johnson.

The second factor that analysts failed to account for was that of the Liberian psyche: backward and native (e. g., juju, witchcraft, and superstition are commonplace); "live and let live" is the politics of the common man, not government; the war has always been tribal, not political; the importance put on Camp Scheiflin and the Executive Mansion (the seat of government) by Doe and the rebels. Even the loss of food, water, and electricity still could not dislodge Doe from the Mansion because in a symbolic sense Monrovia is Liberia and the Mansion is Monrovia. Hence, whoever occupies the Mansion controls Liberia. This can be further proven by the unwillingness of Taylor or Johnson to shell the Mansion or destroy it in any way.

The experts on hand at the Embassy had not progressed very far in their analysis of Taylor by the time the FCE arrived. Instead, at that stage, the American Embassy in Monrovia was painting a picture similar to the "Fall of the Roman Empire" for the rest of the world to read in message traffic. The impression created was that events in Liberia were rapidly deteriorating and that American citizens and prop-

erty were increasingly at risk of wholesale destruction or slaughter. The question was originally not how many Americans we would need to evacuate, but how many would be left alive to evacuate. The one accurate piece of information contained in the early message traffic concerned the ineptitude of the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) and in some cases the NPFL.

Deployment

On 25 May 1990 the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) transmitted a deployment order directing the movement of 22d MEU(SOC) and Phibron 4 to the vicinity of Monrovia in anticipation of the evacuation of noncombatants and security operations at key U.S. installations.

For this operation, the Commander of the Sixth Fleet was designated Commander, Joint Task Force (JTF), and was embarked aboard the USS *Saipan* (LHA 2). 22d MEU(SOC) was embarked aboard the ships of Phibron 4, also known as Task Force 61, which consisted of the USS *Saipan*, USS *Ponce* (LPD 15), and the USS *Sumter* (LST 1181). The USS *Peterson* (DD 969) was also assigned to Task Force 61 for Operation SHARP EDGE. 22d MEU(SOC) consisted of 2d Battalion, 4th Marines (2/4) as the ground combat element, HMM-261 as the air combat element, and Marine Expeditionary Unit Service Support Group (MSSG) 22 as the combat service support element.

Supporting forces consisted of Commander, Fleet Air Mediterranean, who established a forward logistics support base at Lungi Airfield in Freetown, Sierra Leone; the Air Service Coordination Office Mediterranean, which provided C-9 support between Rota, Spain, and Freetown; Helicopter Combat Support Squadron 4, which provided CH-53E support for logistical flights between Freetown and MARG shipping; the KC-130 Continental United States (CONUS) Standby Detachment for 22d MEU(SOC), which provided support in Freetown; and a number of available intelligence assets.

22d MEU(SOC) was conducting training ashore in France while Phibron 4 ships were undergoing maintenance in Toulon, France, when the JCS deployment order was received on 25 May 1990. The MEU was able to successfully complete an emergency backload on 26 May, allowing the MARG

Acronyms

ANGLICO	air/naval gunfire liaison company
AFL	Armed Forces of Liberia
BLS	beach landing site
CinCEur	Commander in Chief, Europe
CONUS	Continental United States
FCE	forward command element
GSO	Government Services Organization
INPFL	Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia
JCS	Joint Chiefs of Staff
MARG	Marine amphibious ready group
MEU(SOC)	Marine expeditionary unit (special operations capable)
MODLOC	miscellaneous operational details, local operations
MSSG	Marine expeditionary unit service support group
NEO	noncombatant evacuation operation
NPFL	National Patriotic Front of Liberia
Phibron	amphibious squadron
RIA	Roberts International Airfield
ROWPU	reverse osmosis water purification unit
RSO	regional security officer
Satcom	satellite communication
SEAL	sea, air, land
SSF	special security force
SUROBs	surf observations
XO	executive officer

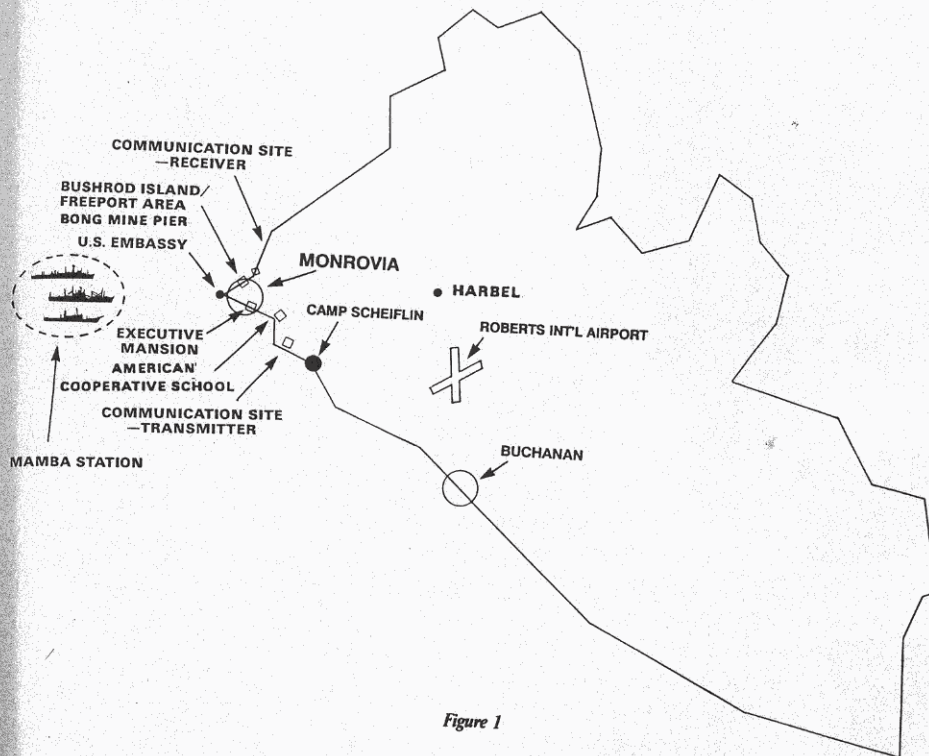


Figure 1

was dispatched ahead of the task force at 30 knots in order to have a force on station as soon as possible. The USS *Peterson* arrived off Monrovia on 2 June, while the remainder of the MARG arrived 24 hours later. This began a show-of-force operation that began on 3 June and lasted until the landing of forces on 5 August. During this time the MARG remained in MODLOC on Mamba Station,* 50 nautical miles off the coast of Liberia.

Organization and Mission of the FCE

The rapid deterioration of the situation in Liberia, coupled with the uncertainty of type/availability of transport for the FCE, presented a task organization problem. Originally, the FCE was to be larger than what was initially dispatched from the USS *Saipan*, but due to the uncertainty of available transportation, it was pared down to include just the MEU executive officer (XO) and battalion XO. Between the two officers, they carried vital satellite communication (Satcom) gear, batteries, food, weapons, ammunition, smoke grenades, and personal gear. Everything was designed to support them for 10 days, since most felt at that time that the crisis would soon be over or the remainder of the MARG would have joined the FCE.

After the two-man FCE departed from the USS *Saipan* and arrived in Rota, Spain, three more men joined the FCE—representatives from a SEAL (sea, air, land) team, an air/naval gunfire liaison company (ANGLICO), and a communications unit. This turned out to be the best combination to accomplish all assigned FCE tasks. As its stay lengthened, it became obvious that a radio battalion augmentation to the FCE was also essential.

This task organization was perfect for the mission. For future FCEs, their organization should start centered on the XO of both the MEU and battalion. This ensures that a tactical and total force approach is taken during every planning step ashore. From there, the rest of the FCE should be task organized to the expected mission (i.e., NEO or humanitarian assistance).

*Mamba Station was a navigational point designated by the Navy where all MARG shipping was located. It should not be confused with Mamba Point, a geographical position along the Liberian coast that housed much of the country's diplomatic community, including the U.S. Embassy.

to depart Toulon on 27 May. Planning began immediately and focus was placed on possible missions, including an NEO, reinforcement of the U.S. Embassy in Monrovia, security for the communication sites, humanitarian assistance, and the possible extraction of key personnel.

One of the most amazing aspects of Operation SHARP EDGE was that the plans developed in early May 1990 were exactly the same ones executed later that August. Detailed planning and continual rehearsals prior to and during the prolonged period of MODLOC (miscellaneous operational details, local) operations, a state of readiness frequently used to describe a geographic position and radius of operation, resulted in the execution of a simple, unchanged original plan. The laborious MEU(SOC) predeployment training for crisis action planning paid big dividends in a crisply executed actual contingency mission months after MARG 2-90's deployment from CONUS.

The plan was set up to allow for the addition or deletion of missions as they occurred. Using this approach, 2/4 and HMM-261 were able to rehearse basic assault packages throughout MODLOC. MSSG-22 demonstrated its flexibility in preparing several levels of support for the NEO, taking into consideration available lift assets and mission assignment.

Anyone who has experienced MODLOC for any length of time can attest to the frustrations and chal-

lenges faced by all. An aggressive training program that supported rehearsals of intended operations, coupled with a commonsense approach to standup/standdown postures, made this MODLOC successful. Countless one-hour alerts were the norm, both real and exercised; these produced a force ready to execute the assigned contingency when the time finally came to move on 5 August. Leadership at all levels was challenged as a result of boredom, irregularity of mail, short supplies of fresh fruit and vegetables, and the constant threat of imminent insertion into a hostile environment. But the sound development of leadership at the lowest levels horizontally across the MEU during the predeployment phase showed through clearly during MODLOC.

As MARG 2-90 transited the Straits of Gibraltar on 29 May, an FCE was placed ashore in Rota, Spain. The FCE was directed to proceed to Monrovia, establish liaison with the U.S. Embassy, and provide detailed information, via satellite communications, to the MEU/Phibron. On 31 May the FCE landed at RIA via a Navy C-130 and proceeded to the American Embassy (see Figure 2). The FCE was to remain in place there carrying out its mission up to, through, and beyond the eventual landing of combat forces ashore on 5 August 1990.

That same day the USS *Peterson*, with a detachment of 75 Marines from 2/4 and a CH-46E from HMM-261,

It would also be helpful to ensure that the State Department receives a thorough briefing as to the capabilities and mission of the FCE as well as the MARG as a whole. Establishing close and continuous coordination with the State Department on the capabilities and functions of the FCE will help avoid the kind of confusion faced by MARG 2-90's FCE when dealing with key Embassy employees about FCE functions.

Missions

The FCE based its mission assignment on the expected taskings for the insertion of the MARG (i.e., NEO and Embassy reinforcement). These missions included the following:

- *Evaluation and Reconnaissance of Helicopter Landing Zones (LZs).* All potential LZs were physically sighted and evaluated. Several were eliminated immediately, either due to redundancy of LZs proximate to one another or an obvious lack of usability (i.e., ones within the primary AFL training center and under the wires at the communication sites). Several new LZs were identified either by moving old ones or, as in the case of LZ Magic, by creative landscaping. The addition of the ANGLICO representative (a CH-46E pilot) was instrumental in evaluating, sketching, and analyzing these LZ areas.

- *Evaluation of Potential Beach Landing Sites (BLSs).* As in the case of the LZs, all potential BLSs were evaluated and given a full survey from the high-water mark and up. In fact, in most cases a physical survey of the surf zone was done. The addition of the SEAL representative to the FCE made this possible; without him none of the critical beach evaluations could have been conducted. One primary BLS in particular received twice-daily surf observations (SUROBS) for several weeks in expectation of its use as a possible amphibious insertion point for NEO forces. SUROBS, however, had to be terminated once this beach and its SUROBS evaluators came under constant AFL observation.

- *Evaluation of Assembly Sites.* Two major assembly sites were selected and evaluated—the American Embassy compound and the American Cooperative School. A third area was identified—one of the communication sites—but was never used. In addition,

the Freeport facility adjacent to the Coast Guard Station and the Bong Mine Pier in the port area were both evaluated and offered as potentially useful sites. Assembly sites were identified to potential evacuees by the State Department. According to the final plan, evacuees were to move from the assembly sites to evacuation sites on their own. Only a few exceptions were identified as potential areas where individuals who were unable to reach the evacuation site might have to be picked up. However, the MARG decided that individuals picked up at isolated areas would be flown directly to ships for processing rather than via the evacuation sites.

- *Drafting an American Embassy Reinforcement Plan.* Working closely with the regional security officer (RSO), the FCE was able to outline a basic Embassy reinforcement plan prior to the MARG's arrival. This plan, while improved upon over the ensuing weeks, basically remained unchanged from its inception to its execution. The size of the force as well as its concept of employment were driven mainly by the physical layout of the Embassy and surrounding multistoried buildings. The plan encompassed securing the surrounding multistoried building threat, outside perimeter patrols along the U.N. Drive side of the Embassy wall, inner patrols along the Embassy wall, locating automatic weapon and key observation posts within the compound, and finally, the staging of a reaction force within the compound itself. Integrated into the plan was the use of the State Department's special security forces (SSFs) under RSO supervision and the Marine Security Guard detachment. The local civilian guard force employed at the gates and around the perimeter were discounted immediately due to their lack of weapons. Depending upon the threat, reinforcements could have been inserted directly into the compound (LZ Magic) from waterside or adjacent to the compound (LZ Eagle) (see Figure 2). Both insertion points were feasible and involved little to no local security to ensure a "cold" zone.

In addition to these primary missions, the FCE also conducted numerous secondary missions. In order of importance, least to most, the following were accomplished within the first

30 days in-country:

- *Beach Survey of Potential Non-NEO-Related Amphibious Operations.* Several potential BLSs were evaluated for future amphibious training operations. Sketches were provided and detailed SUROBS were given on beach sites located to the north and southeast of Monrovia.

- *Reinforcement of the Government Services Organization (GSO) Compound.* This compound was evaluated as a potential U.S. property site that might need protection during civil strife, particularly against potential looting since it was located adjacent to the primary AFL Training Center (see Figure 2). The evaluation was terminated prior to completion when the decision was made by the Embassy not to protect it.

- *Communication Site Reinforcement.* Initial evaluations were made of these sites due to a prior decision by the Embassy not to abandon them. This evaluation was scrapped after the Embassy staff determined that the communication sites were under constant threat of seizure by rebel forces and not worth the time or effort needed to reinforce them. The communication receiver site, however, later became important because of its cistern, which helped meet the water needs of the Embassy compound. Additionally, it and the transmitter site (see Figure 1) became an evacuation site for Embassy employees stranded there during subsequent fighting.

- *Greystone Compound Reinforcement.* A complete evaluation and task assessment was completed concerning securing the Greystone compound. It was initially stated by the deputy chief of mission, prior to the Ambassador's arrival in-country, that Greystone would need some means of protection since nonevacuees would be diverted there by Embassy personnel during an NEO. The plan encompassed securing key multistoried structures surrounding the compound, patrols on the outside of the compound wall, patrols along the inner wall areas, positioning automatic weapons and key observation posts within the compound, and a reaction force on standby in the compound. A sizable force was necessary to secure this area due to its large grounds and its lack of adequate physical barriers. The surrounding wall was breached in many spots and easily overcome in many other areas. The plan was later

scrapped by the new Ambassador, who declared that Greystone compound would be abandoned and that no American personnel would reside in it. Consequently, all American citizens, as well as the FCE, moved out of Greystone in one day and moved into apartments directly across from the Embassy compound. This left only a large number of Foreign Service Nationals as residents of Greystone. Later in the crisis it was to serve as a refugee center.

- *Liaison With Consular Staff on Running an NEO at the Evacuation Sites.* Prior to the MARG's arrival, the FCE and appropriate State Department personnel physically walked the terrain of each site (Embassy compound and American Cooperative School). Tasks were verbally assigned and State Department personnel were briefed on MARG capabilities, plans, and assistance including MSSG assistance in processing personnel and forms.

- *Developing a Humanitarian Relief Package.* The FCE devised a plan whereby available but limited MARG supplies and assets could be used to provide emergency medical and food relief to the noncombatant civilian populace. A memorandum was prepared outlining the plan and was presented to the Embassy economics officer. Unfortunately, the plan was never put into effect.

- *Exchanging Intelligence Between the FCE and Embassy Officials.* If the FCE was able to do one thing on a continual basis after it finished its initial mission taskings, it was to provide Embassy officials with intercepted intelligence. The addition of three radio battalion personnel with intercept equipment as well as the daily input from the MARG provided Embassy officials with another source of information about what was going on in Liberia. All intercepted material was exchanged directly to the Ambassador and his staff. In return, the FCE was provided daily situation and human intelligence reports as well as official interpretations of their significance.

Once the FCE accepted the fact that this was not to be a rapid evacuation of personnel and departure from the area, the real task at hand became twofold. First, keep the MARG informed on all significant events in Monrovia by both the rebels and Embassy officials. Second, and probably

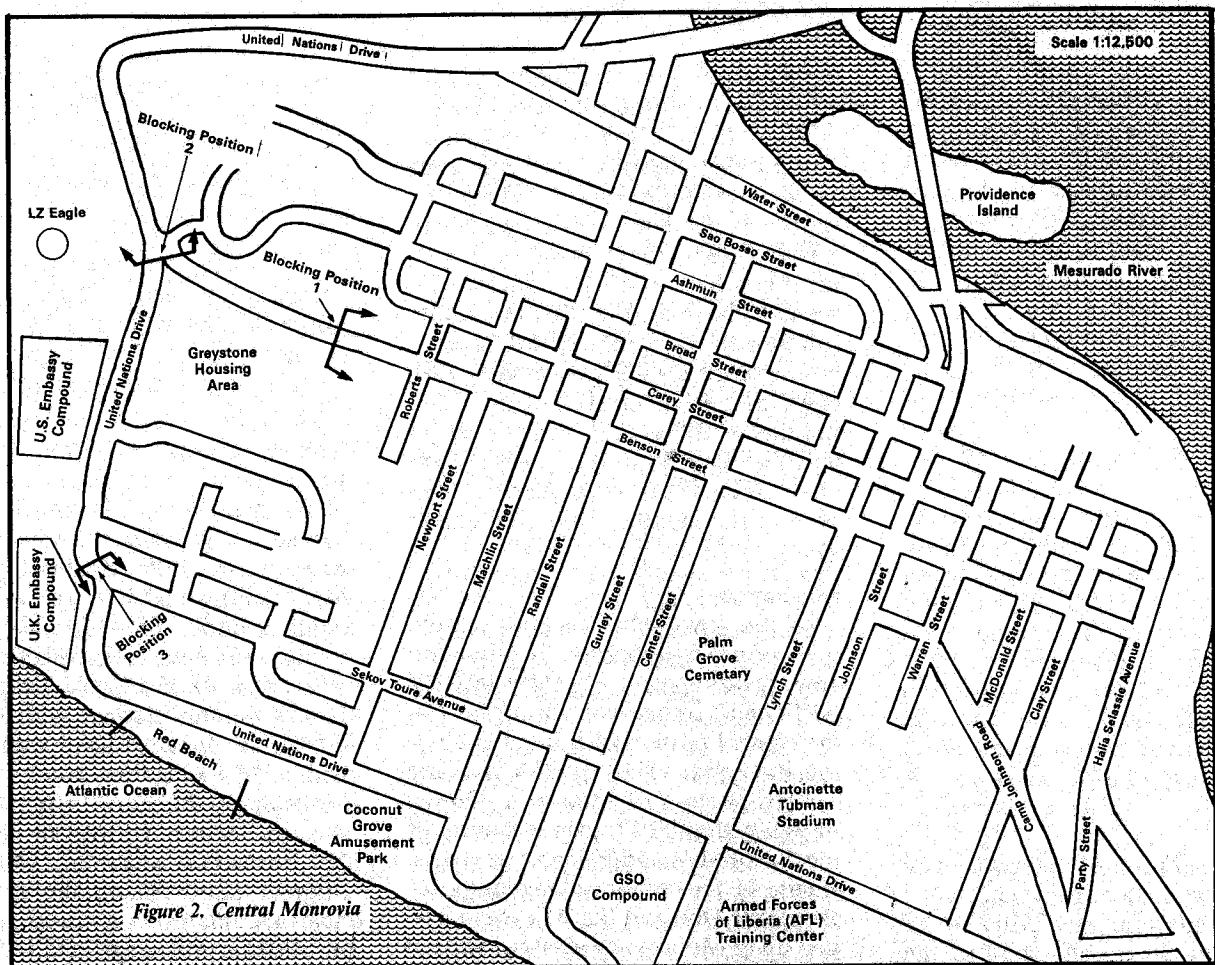


Figure 2. Central Monrovia

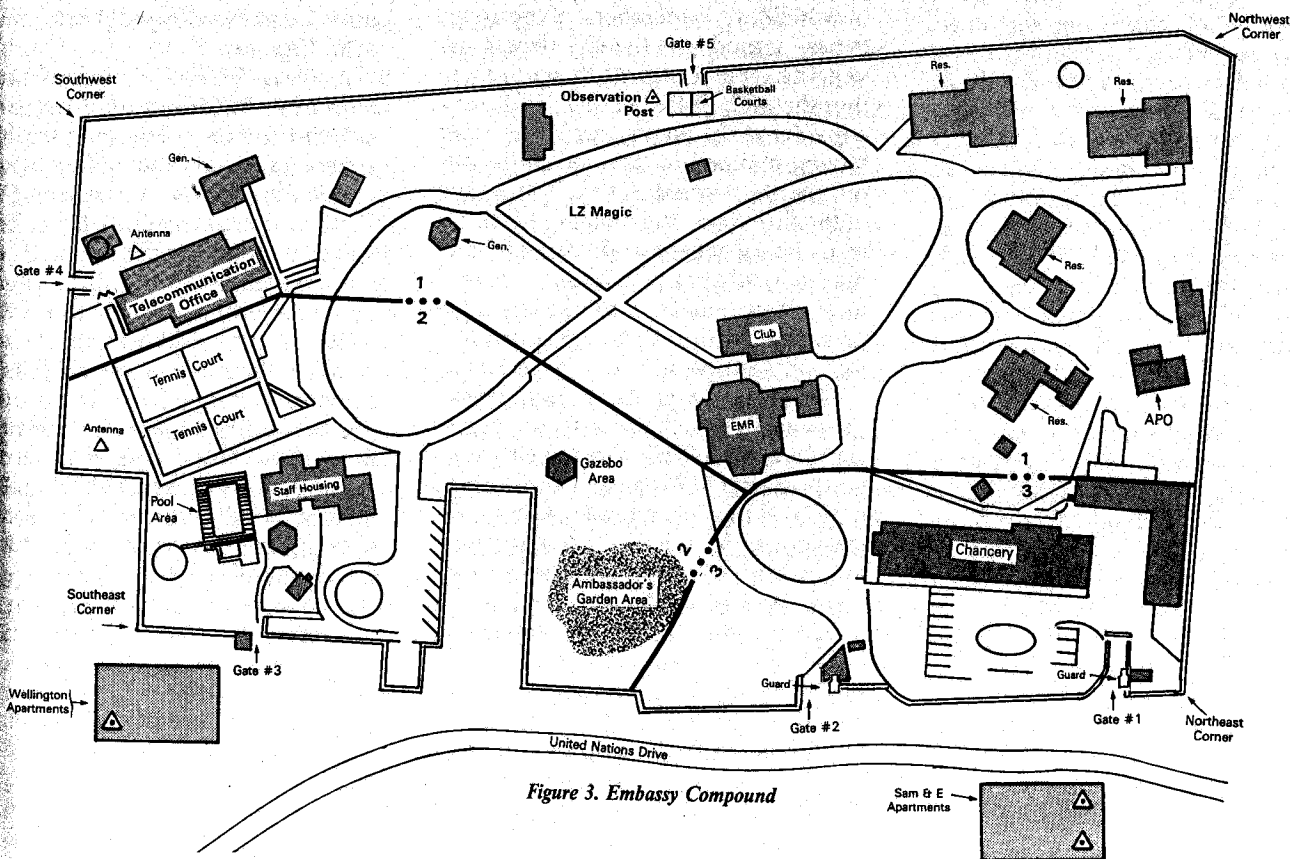


Figure 3. Embassy Compound

the most important for the FCE, continually remind the Embassy that the FCE is there to assess the situation and provide timely recommendations as to the appropriate military response. It is incumbent on the FCE, in this and other similar situations, to remember that once the initial threat seems to have died down, the military solution to any problem will usually be the least desired by Embassy officials. The FCE must recognize that military leaders in a crisis plan in terms of days and hours, while Embassy officials in a crisis plan in terms of weeks, months, and sometimes years.

Evacuation

As the two rebel factions closed their grip on Monrovia, the situation grew steadily worse. By early July the NPFL had gained control of most of the central portion of Liberia, including Buchanan, Harbel, RIA, and the eastern portion of Monrovia. During mid-July, the INPFL gained control of the Bushrod Island/Freeport area (see Figure 1). Except for isolated outposts, President Doe and his AFL were bottled up in Monrovia with thousands of refugees. These refugees, the majority of which were members of nonrebel tribes, poured into the city fleeing advancing rebel forces. At this point neither the AFL, NPFL, nor INPFL were considered the enemy per se, all sides having claimed to have no animosity toward the United States. The nature of the threat was the danger of U.S. citizens being caught in the fighting and inadvertently harmed. As July dragged on, however, and more anti-U.S. incidents occurred, it became evident that this situation would soon degenerate.

The situation took a radical downturn on 4 August when Prince Johnson and his INPFL threatened to begin arresting U.S. citizens and foreign nationals in order to spark foreign intervention. As Johnson's forces began to openly seek U.S. citizens as hostages, the U.S. Ambassador requested that the MARG conduct a drawdown of U.S. citizens, foreign nationals, and other designated personnel. Additionally, he requested that the Embassy be reinforced by MARG forces. Accordingly, Commander in Chief Europe (CinCEur) issued an execute order on the night of 4 August. D-day was set for 5 August.

The execute order assigned the fol-

lowing tasks to 22d MEU(SOC):

- Evacuate American citizens from the two communication sites.
- Reinforce the American Embassy in Monrovia with a reinforced rifle company.
- Evacuate American citizens and other designated foreign nationals from the American Embassy.
- Provide logistical support, as required, to the American Embassy.

The crisis action team aboard the USS *Saipan* met at 2100 (local) on 4 August to review and refine developed plans. A final confirmation brief was held at 0500 on 5 August at which L-hour was set for 0900. By that time all MARG ships had closed to within six nautical miles of Monrovia, which found them encountering some of the worst weather of the past few months. Heavy thunderstorms had reduced takeoff parameters to bare minimums, with a 300-foot ceiling and 1-mile visibility being the norm. Regardless of this hindrance, HMM-261 was still able to launch within minutes of the original plan. Again, the many rehearsals, often one mission per week by HMM-261 during MODLOC, paid off as pilots lifted off the USS *Saipan* and disappeared rapidly into the surrounding mist.

At 0906, 5 CH-46Es inserted a platoon of 45 Marines from Company E, 2/4, the company commander, and a small command element into the communication receiving site (see Figure 1). This was no easy task for either pilots or the platoon due to the fact that the site had developed into a huge refugee camp. At L-hour there were over 5,000 refugees within the site along with all their attendant shelters and personal belongings. After overcoming these difficulties, all 18 evacuees were located after the platoon from Company E had secured the LZ and the surrounding area. No resistance was met at this location by MARG forces. By 0913 all evacuees were extracted; minutes later the platoon itself was also extracted. Soon, all troops and evacuees were back aboard the *Saipan*, just over a half-hour from original liftoff.

At 0926, 2 CH-46Es and 1 CH-53D inserted another platoon of 45 Marines, the company executive officer, and a small command element from Company E, 2/4 into the communication transmitter site (see Figure 1). Af-

ter securing the LZ, the three evacuees and all troops departed the site by 0929. While no resistance was encountered here, about 20 rebels from the INPFL located about 500 meters from the site began to show signs of wanting to take a closer look. This action was promptly discouraged by the establishment of a secure defensive perimeter and a few quick passes over the rebels by the CH-53D. At 0937 all evacuees and troops from this insertion operation were also safely aboard the *Saipan*.

Drawdown and Reinforcement

At 0910 the first elements of Company H (reinforced), 2/4 landed into LZ Magic inside the Embassy compound. A total of 237 Marines and 6 fast attack vehicles were lifted in with them by means of 8 CH-53Ds and 5 CH-46E lifts. By 1115 all Marines and vehicles had been inserted and 40 U.S. citizens and foreign nationals had been extracted. By the end of 5 August a total of 13 more evacuees had been removed from the Embassy bringing to a total 74 evacuees from all sites.

Upon landing in LZ Magic in the first helicopter, the commanding officer of Company H was met by elements of the FCE, and a quick reconfirmation of the plan took place. Because LZ Magic was a small one-helicopter zone, the commanding officer had to deal with problems presented by the slow buildup of forces inside the compound. Priority was given to setting up small security forces at each gate. After this was accomplished, forces were moved outside the Embassy compound to set up blocking positions to effectively seal off the Embassy from any outside forces attempting to enter it—rebel or AFL (see Figure 2).

Within a short time of insertion, Company H quickly established security positions inside the Embassy compound. Defensive positions were established at each of the gates and roving patrols were run within the compound. In this way a quick reaction force was established. Some resistance was also encountered by Company H at this time.

As elements of Company H established a defensive position at Gate 1, a small INPFL patrol began to approach the Embassy along U.N. Drive from the direction of the intersection of U.N. Drive and Benson Street (see Figure 2). A squad-sized element from Company H quickly forced the rebel

patrol back in the direction it had come from; it then ensured that the patrol had indeed cleared the area. This effort was accomplished without incident and mainly involved the use of a bullhorn and the display of disciplined and highly trained Marines. After the patrol had been chased away from the area, Company H continued to secure the surrounding area outside the Embassy by clearing a known rebel safehouse at the intersection of U.N. Drive and Benson Street and then establishing blocking positions at key locations.

The three blocking positions established outside the Embassy were each manned by rifle squads reinforced with two heavy machinegun fast attack vehicles. Observation posts were established at key vantage points both in and outside the Embassy compound. Observation posts were considered critical to the security of the Embassy since the surrounding terrain and multistoried buildings adjacent to the Embassy effectively isolated the compound and presented severe restrictions to both observation and fields of fire. Additionally, the Greystone compound housing area directly across from the Embassy had evolved into a massive refugee compound by the time of the landing. Greystone became a continual worry as a possible staging area for rebel or AFL forces, and continuous observation of the housing area became a top priority for Company H.

By nightfall on 5 August the reinforcement of the American Embassy had been firmly established. Political and legal considerations, however, had caused CinCEur to order all Marines, excluding the FCE, back inside the Embassy compound. Additionally, Phibron 4 was directed to withdraw all ships just over the horizon by first light on 6 August. The defensive positions initially established by 2/4 remained in effect until the battalion was relieved by 3/8 later in the month.

Company H remained ashore until it was relieved by Company E on 13 August. Company H's stay was marked by the continual presence of both rebel and AFL forces along U.N. Drive. On one occasion, an armed patrol of 18 AFL soldiers attempted to pass by the Embassy along U.N. Drive from the south. After being threatened with the use of riot control agents, the patrol wisely turned back in the direction it

came from. Seconds later an INPFL patrol appeared approaching the Embassy along U.N. Drive from the north. It too was turned back, but had it shown up minutes earlier, Company H would have certainly been caught in the crossfire of two opposing forces. Daily evacuations and hardening of defensive positions characterized the remainder of Company H's stay ashore until its replacement on 13 August by Company E.

Relief occurred without incident using LZ Magic as a staging area. The decision had also been made to reduce the size of the force down to a reinforced platoon. After 13 August, and until turnover, the size of the reinforcement force was 65 Marines, excluding the FCE. Company E continued the defense as well as the daily evacuations out of LZ Magic. The most notable evacuations took place on 16 and 18 August, when 359 Indians and 754 Lebanese were evacuated.

Miscellaneous Observations

An interesting footnote to the SHARP EDGE NEO was that the rifle companies that subsequently went ashore to perform the Embassy reinforcement mission found themselves performing the traditional roles of the MSSG as well as those of the consular staff. Since most of the consular staff had been drawn down or previously evacuated and due to a limitation on the number of military personnel ashore, the bulk of the 1,648 evacuees handled by MARG 2-90 were screened, processed, and moved to the evacuation site by rifle companies. Their previous training during special operations exercises and MODLOC in conducting hasty NEO tasks served them well throughout the operation and certainly validated one more concept in the MEU(SOC) training syllabus.

Prior to the landing on 5 August the living conditions inside the Embassy compound had gradually deteriorated. The lack of fresh water and food were the main problems. As the perimeter of safety shrunk about the Embassy, more staff were moved into the compound until by 5 August only a handful of employees and the FCE lived off the compound. When Company H landed, the problem of billeting them and keeping them out of the way had already been addressed by the FCE and Embassy staff. The rein-

forcement force was housed throughout temporary existing structures inside the Embassy (see Figure 3). When not on security duty or reaction force standby, the Marines remained in their assigned compound area. This was critical because of the tempo of activity going on around them (i.e., evacuations out of LZ Magic, inbound logistical buildup, establishment of a reverse osmosis water purification unit (ROWPU) site, etc.).

The reaction forces for Gates 1, 2, and 3 were placed adjacent to their respective gate areas. Gate 1's reaction force was maintained in an area under renovation next to the gate affording good cover and concealment. Gate 2's reaction force was comprised of the fast attack vehicles that were kept parked inside the gate. Gate 3's reaction force had the luck of being placed at the Embassy swimming pool area. Battalion and company headquarters originally were located inside the Ambassador's residence, but were soon moved into the garden area adjacent to that residence.

All posts, including the observation posts and sniper positions, were hard-wired into the company command post. MX-300s were used to communicate within the force as well as with the Embassy staff. Satcom continued out of the Embassy conference room, and normal military communication assets completed the hookup between the forces ashore and afloat as well as those at CinCEur and Sixth Fleet headquarters. Communication was never a problem.

Fire support available to the forces ashore was also adequate. Helicopter flights into all three of the evacuation sites were escorted by two AH-1Ts or UH-1Ns that were based off the coast. Additionally, a section of AV-8Bs remained on the *Saipan* on five-minute deck alert. After 5 August, escort for inbound and outbound transport flights remained. The escort assets also were invaluable as airborne observation posts to supplement what was ashore. For naval gunfire, the USS *Peterson* (DD 969) was on station in a fire support area three nautical miles to the west of Bushrod Island (see Figure 1).

Prior to turnover, one more evacuation operation occurred at the port of Buchanan. On 11 August, NPFL leader Charles Taylor, not to be outdone by Prince Johnson and the INPFL,

contacted the American Embassy in Abidjan, Ivory Coast, and gave his approval of the evacuation of Spanish, Swiss, German, and Vatican citizens. These individuals had fled Monrovia earlier and traveled to Buchanan in the hopes of evacuation. On 12 August an execute order was received from CinCEur to carry out the mission.

While the evacuations continued at the Embassy, the *Saipan* and *Peterson* traveled south to a position off the port city of Buchanan to support the evacuation. Eventually, 4 CH-46Es and 1 LCM-8 conducted the evacuation of 99 personnel. The unusual aspect to this operation was that the NPFL would not allow any weapons to be carried by either Marines or supporting aircraft. The evacuation occurred without a hitch as the NPFL watched 96 personnel leaving via helicopters and 3 via the LCM-8.

Logistics Buildup Ashore

The combined goal of the amphibious task force and landing force commanders was to leave the Embassy with a 30-day supply of food, fuel, and water by the time the MARG pulled out. DESERT SHIELD was well under way by this time, and it appeared that the MARG and its relief would have to move onto drier pastures. Therefore, the Navy and MSSG-22 set out to accomplish a herculean task in a short time. The assets of HMM-261 were pressed to the limits as over 1,600 sorties were flown in support of the logistic buildup as well as the continued evacuation process. MSSG-22 worked 24 hours a day to accomplish this mission. By turnover time on 21 August, the 22d MEU(SOC) had provided the Embassy with 35,500 gallons of JP-5 fuel flown in via 500-gallon bladders. (HMM-261's helicopter expeditionary refueling system pump was used to transfer the fuel to the Embassy fuel tanks.)

Additional items flown in included 660 gallons of lubrication oil, 28 pallets of food supplies, 2 pallets of medical supplies, and 4,800 gallons of water to be placed into Embassy cisterns. Despite the efforts of MSSG-22 and HMM-261, the ROWPU was never able to be put into operation. The main problem with the ROWPU was that the unit could only be placed atop a 150-foot cliff above the sea. No matter how many times helicopters or

MSSG personnel attempted to relocate the suction line, the pumps were unable to lift the seawater effectively up the cliff face.

When MARG 3-90 arrived on Mamba Station on 20 August, 22d MEU(SOC) began conducting a relief-in-place with 26th MEU(SOC); a turnover at sea was completed the following day. With its mission complete and a new MARG on the scene, MARG 2-90 departed Mamba Station on 22 August after evacuating 1,648 personnel. 26th MEU(SOC), however, would continue to maintain forces ashore until the completion of Operation SHARP EDGE on 9 January 1991.

Reflections

Our situation in Liberia was certainly unique. Most FCEs in the future probably will not have the advantage of spending two months in the target nation as we did. We were able to develop plans in detail and coordinate their execution with both Embassy staff ashore and MARG planners afloat. Personality differences played an important part in the overall operation because of the time spent working with each key Embassy official. By the time MARG forces landed ashore on 5 August they were able to fall in on a solid plan that had been rehearsed countless times during MODLOC and discussed in great detail with key Embassy officials. This is not to imply that changes in the plan didn't occur. In fact, there were significant events that tested the flexibility of both the local commanders and Embassy officials. Two examples of this were the decision to keep U.S. forces within the Embassy compound vice outside the compound and the NEO being conducted without significant MSSG assets or personnel and without a full consular staff.

In conclusion, Operation SHARP EDGE was as successful as it was because of the innovativeness that MEU(SOC) training breeds at all levels of leadership. Both the FCE and MARG planners applied solid training received during the predeployment training cycle to the work they did during actual operations ashore in Liberia. As evidenced by our experience, the MEU(SOC) program really works and adds a sizable capability to the overall effectiveness of the Navy-Marine Corps team.

USMC

